



Remarks as delivered by The Honorable DNI James R. Clapper: Transparency in Intelligence “With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility” at the AFCEA/INSA National Security and Intelligence Summit

**Remarks as delivered by
The Honorable James R. Clapper
Director of National Intelligence**

**Transparency in Intelligence
“With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility”**

**AFCEA/INSA National Security and Intelligence Summit
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Thanks. It's great to be back on this stage with this integrated AFCEA and INSA group. I've spent the past 5 years preaching the gospel of “intelligence integration.” It's been my major theme during my tenure as DNI. It's really the reason my office exists. It's what the 9/11 Commission advocated. And it's what IRTPA, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, legislated. But perhaps my successor won't need to even talk about it.

This morning, seeing Mo Baginski and Joe DeTrani working together almost makes me feel like “intelligence integration” is catching. [laughter]

By the way, “Mo” and “Joe” has a certain ring to it, [laughter] either a singing duo, [laughter] or selling car parts together. [laughter] However, for the rest of this speech, in the spirit of integration, I'll refer to you jointly as, “Mojo.” [laughter]

I think that's appropriate, because you definitely have the joint AFCEA/INSA mojo going this morning, as evidenced by this great crowd. So, thank you both for the invitation to kick off this great summit and for nurturing this spirit of working together.

When I was here last year, I spoke about our then-new national intelligence strategy, quite literally on the day our publication was rolling off the presses. This year, we don't have anything as obvious to talk about. So I went to the Summit website to read what “Mojo” [laughter] expected me to talk about. Here's what the Summit website said I'd be discussing:

U.S. intelligence is an essential instrument of national power, and perhaps has never been more powerful than today, given advances in technology. And with great power comes great responsibility.

Now, that last line really struck me. “With great power comes great responsibility.” Apparently



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“Mojo” [laughter] think that I’m – Spiderman. [laughter] In the interest of transparency, I’ll tell you, I’m not. [laughter] I asked my staff, and they say I look a lot more like Spidey’s “Uncle Ben,” [laughter] just with less hair. [laughter]

But I feel like I have a personal connection to the webslinger. That line, “With great power comes great responsibility,” was used to introduce Spidey’s first comic book appearance in 1962. And, in the spring of 1963, just as I was starting off in the intelligence business, Marvel published the first issue of “The Amazing Spiderman.” Coincidence?

Yes. [laughter]

All kidding aside, the IC has a lot in common with Spiderman. We constantly have to worry about cover concerns, someone matching our secret identities to our every-day, normal lives.

Both Spiderman and his alter-ego Peter Parker are known for their genius-level intellect. We in the IC are known for our geniuses – in subjects ranging from mathematics and cryptology, to denial and deception, and even rocket science.

Spiderman is known for his superhuman strength. A few days a week, I lift weights in our office gym. And my spotter says I’m pretty strong, for a geezer. [laughter] Of course, my spotter is normally one of my security detail guys. So his evaluation of my weight-room prowess may be a bit biased. [laughter]

Spiderman is known for his precognitive “Spidey Sense.” Many of our customers expect us to be clairvoyant when it comes to world events.

Spidey is known as the “webslinger,” because he shoots spider webs from devices on his wrists. Some of the bad guys derisively call him “webhead.” More-and-more, we in the IC are focused on cyber intelligence and the World Wide Web. Okay, I’ll grant you, that’s a stretch. [laughter]

There are even similarities between Spiderman and the IC when it comes to governance. Stan Lee and Marvel created Spiderman and still publish Spidey comics, but Sony Pictures has creative control of Spidey on film. Similarly, every IC agency and element other than CIA and ODNI are in someone else’s cabinet department, and so integrating priorities and resources across the IC is not easy, particularly when it comes to following the different laws, rules, and processes that resides in each of the departments.

And while we’re listing similarities, don’t forget, Sony Pictures and I both have had



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less-than-friendly interactions with North Korea. [laughter]

By the way, every Spidey fan here is hoping Marvel and Sony can successfully integrate efforts to give the webslinger an awesome role in, “Captain America: Civil War.”

So, we in the IC have a lot in common, at least superficially, with the character who’s arguably Marvel Comics’ most popular. But I’m going to set aside those comparisons for a few minutes, because those few sentences on the AFCEA-INSA Summit website, the ones posted just under my picture, make a really good point: intelligence is a “powerful” and “essential” tool for our national security enterprise, and, “with great power comes great responsibility.”

Those statements have been true as long as I can remember, and I can remember back a long way. My dad was in the SIGINT [signals intelligence] business in WWII. And as a consequence of traveling around the globe with him, I grew up on intelligence sites and antenna farms all over the world. Back then, we didn’t talk about intelligence publicly.

Five decades later, that’s of course changed. In fact, that’s changed a lot, just over the past three years. I admit, because of my experience growing up in the SIGINT business and my five decades of intelligence work, the kind of transparency we’re engaged in now feels almost genetically antithetical to me. As I think back, as I’m wont to do these days, I think Air Force 2nd Lt. Jim Clapper, from 1963, would be shocked by the level of detail with which we talk about SIGINT specifically and intelligence activities in general in 2015.

But that’s been one of my major takeaways the past few years. Yes, we have to protect our secrets: our sources and methods, our tradecraft; but we have to be more transparent about the things we *can* talk about, because now, the American public expects us to talk about how we’re using the power of U.S. intelligence responsibly. And again, “with great power comes great responsibility.”

That’s a lesson I personally believe we didn’t learn quickly enough, and that “we” certainly includes me. So that’s why, more-and-more, we’re discussing our work: to correct misunderstandings and to try to help people grasp what we do, to show that we’re worthy of America’s trust, and to prove that we make worthwhile contributions to the security of Americans and our friends and allies around the world.

It’s why, over the past two years, the Community has declassified more than 5,000 pages of documents about our work and, importantly, about the oversight of our work conducted by all three branches of government. And by publishing those declassified documents on our Tumblr site: “IC on the Record” and pushing them out on Facebook and Twitter, they reached millions



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of people in the U.S. and around the world.

That includes, of course, our adversaries, who have learned a lot from our transparency. But we have come down on the side of – transparency is worth the cost. We declassified those documents to show that we follow the law, and when we do make mistakes, we do our best to live up to that line Stan Lee wrote just a few months before I joined the intelligence business: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

We understand the truth in that line. It’s why the President challenged us in a speech, in January of last year, to formalize privacy protections for our signals intelligence efforts, at home and abroad, and to be more transparent about how we implement those protections. This past January, we published a comprehensive report, answering the challenges the President publicly gave us in 2014.

We also supported the USA Freedom Act, which authorizes increased reporting of how the IC exercises some of its authorities. And this past February, we published the “Principles of Intelligence Transparency,” and we stood up an IC Transparency Working Group, with senior representatives from all over the IC. I meet with these great people. Their purpose is to transform those principles into action.

I want to talk about those four transparency principles for a moment. They’re fairly simple. One: provide appropriate transparency to enhance public understanding of the IC. That principle says what we ought to be transparent about and why. Two: be proactive and clear in making information publicly available, of course, when we can. That gets into how we should be transparent. Three: protect information about intelligence sources, methods, and activities. And four: align IC roles, resources, processes, and policies to support transparency implementation.

The tenets three and four essentially say that protecting our tradecraft – our sources, methods, and activities – is an individual responsibility for each person who holds a security clearance; while transparency is an institutional responsibility for the IC as an enterprise.

If a member of the IC, blue badge or green badge, comes across information she thinks we should make public, we have processes in place already to review it for declassification. And if someone comes across something she thinks we’re doing wrong, we have lots of avenues to report that activity, including legitimate avenues for whistle blowing.

To make sure our workforce knows their rights and responsibilities on these issues, we’ve been publicizing how to recommend something for declassification, how to properly blow a whistle, and what their protections are if they do so.



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We’re also increasingly reaching out to the American public. As our “Transparency Principle Two” says, we need to be proactive and clear with transparency, because we’re trying to help the public understand what we do in their name. It’s why we, as an IC, have declassified and published so many significant documents that Tumblr selected our “IC on the Record” site for their 2014 “end of year review.”

That’s a big reason why, this spring, we sent our National Intelligence Council to the South by Southwest festival to engage the diverse group of people there and get them to help us identify themes to include in our next Global Trends report.

It’s also why, this summer, we published a huge tranche of documents we’d collected during the 2012 Abbottabad raid, probably later than we should have, but we got to it. By the way, our publication of “Bin Laden’s Bookshelf” gave us about as much web traffic in just two days – 750,000 site visits and 2 million page-views – as our website received in all of 2013 and 2014 put together. And if you ran a Google search for “bin Laden,” dni.gov was the number two search result, behind only Wikipedia.

And tomorrow, in the name of transparency, I’ll be on Capitol Hill in an open hearing, testifying on cyber threats and cyber intelligence.

Of course, transparency can help us with mission too, particularly when we’re able to use imagery publicly. In 2013, we showed how Syria had used chemical weapons on its own people. In 2014, we helped make public a diplomacy case against Russia for obfuscating what happened to Malaysia Airlines Flight 17

We’ve also shared imagery to help people in need. As we passed the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina a couple weeks ago, I found myself thinking about the work NGA did back when I was director. In the aftermath of the hurricane, Admiral Thad Allen, then Commandant of the Coast Guard, reached out to NGA for help in figuring out what precisely the storm had done to New Orleans, to the state of Louisiana, and the state of Mississippi; how it had decimated so much property, rerouted the waterways, and blocked the ports; in general, helping him with situational awareness to manage the response to this disaster.

The Coast Guard and NGA ended up working very closely together, and in the process I got to know Thad Allen pretty well. I consider him both a personal hero and a close friend. This spring, my wife Sue and I had dinner with Thad and his wife, Pam, and as old war horses are wont to do, we reminisced and told war stories. [laughter] And I found that, among the few mementos that Thad and Pam display in their home is a topographical, three-dimensional map of New



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Orleans given to him by NGA when he retired.

He recalled fondly the superb work NGA did after Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, as well as in the aftermath of the BP oil spill. That was all work that mattered, that directly made a difference to American citizens. And the people who were on the ground remember it.

As we’ve pushed forward with transparency initiatives, we’ve been able to help with tragedies and natural disasters around the world. Last summer and fall, the IC and NGA had a huge and largely unsung impact on the control and containment of Ebola in West Africa, by providing open data on human geography to the countries and NGOs that were involved, and for the first time ever, setting up a publicly-available website for disaster support.

And this spring, NGA and the IC put the lessons we learned from the Ebola outbreak into action after the earthquake in Nepal, producing damage assessments, reporting on the operating status of airfields, providing estimates on internally displaced people, and displaying studies of transportation routes. We saved lives and set a community on the other side of the world on the road to recovery.

Those are things the Intelligence Community has done that I’m pretty proud of. Once we made a commitment to be transparent, doing those things, helping people in need, were easy decisions, easy commitments to make. I think, going forward, we’re going to have to be more transparent in talking about hard decisions and difficult choices, because we’re in a difficult business in a challenging time.

This morning, I started my speech with a comparison of superficial similarities between the IC and Spiderman. I think there’s one other thing that the Intelligence Community has in common with Spidey, and more distinctly with Peter Parker. This gets to the heart of why Spiderman has been one of Marvel’s most popular characters since the first issue of “The Amazing Spiderman,” 52 years ago, the same year I started in intelligence.

Before Spidey, most comic books primarily depicted the external struggle between the superhero and the super-villain. It was “Superman versus Lex Luthor – with Kryptonite.”

With Peter Parker, for the first time, comic readers saw a hero’s inner struggles. They shared his experiences of trying to keep his job and earn enough to survive, trying to talk to girls, [laughter] and watching helplessly as a loved one, his Uncle Ben, dies. And more than anything else, Peter struggled with deciding what to do when his principles, his personal values, came in conflict with each other.



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That’s what made Spiderman such an interesting character to follow. People have always related to his inner struggle with decisions. Peter found that, sometimes he couldn’t keep a promise to a friend and at the same time, as Spiderman, help someone in need.

The Intelligence Community is composed of people who similarly face tough choices. I think this often gets lost in the public discussion. We, as an institution and as a workforce, have principles and values that sometimes come into conflict; things like: our need to keep sources and methods secret, and our desire to be more open and transparent with what we do; things like: pursuing terrorists and others who want to do harm and protecting the privacy and civil liberties of the typical citizens – not just of this country, but of the world – who are rarely, but sometimes caught up in our collection efforts against the bad guys.

Solutions for these conflicts are not always obvious. I’ve been in meetings in which we, literally, pulled out our copies of the Constitution and Bill of Rights to get to the ground truth of what our principles and our obligations are. Wrestling with Constitutional issues to make difficult decisions is part of our daily business and is just a fragment of what makes an IC career so unique.

This is a difficult business. I’ve been in this job, as John [Negroponte, INSA Chairman] mentioned, a little more than five years, and every day I realize that fact a little more. I’ve been pondering how to best express my feelings on my career and this job. Just last week, I came across an email in my inbox that captured them and expressed them better than I ever could have done. This was something that FBI Director Jim Comey, one of our great leaders in all of government, sent out to his staff. I want to share his thoughts. He wrote:

I have been thinking about humility lately. One of my weaknesses has long been over-confidence. I don’t know whether it was the product of nature or nurture, but from an early age, I had a tendency to reach a conclusion quickly, hold to it firmly, and argue about it until the sun went down. [laughter]

Fortunately a whole lot of life experience has helped beat that out of me. [laughter] In fact, the older I get, the less I know for absolute certain, and the more I realize my own ability to see clearly and to reason well is limited.

That’s one of the reasons it is so important to have people around me who see the world differently and who will tell me what they see and conclude, so that together we can make better decisions.”

Jim Comey’s email absolutely nails what I’ve been thinking and pondering of late. There is a



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human aspect to intelligence work that gets lost in the public discussion. We’re human, and when we forget that, when we’re utterly certain about everything, when we stop questioning and stop listening to the people around us who see the world differently, we’re more likely to make mistakes and poor decisions. That’s what it means to be human.

Fans of “The Amazing Spiderman” love Peter Parker, because we can relate to his humanity. He struggles, he tries his best, he makes mistakes, he learns from them, and he keeps going. And he constantly tries to live up to the line that became his creed: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

That line so succinctly describes what the people of the intelligence community try to live up to, every day: to show that we’re worthy of America’s trust and that we’re worthwhile, because – spoiler alert – we’re not comic book characters. We’re Americans working to protect our nation, and at the same time, striving to live up to our nation’s values.

So thanks again, “Mojo” for inviting me to kick off this Summit. Thanks to everyone here this morning for listening, and for being here in the spirit of integration to map out where our community goes next.